

**December 2013**

**Submission to EFRA Committee on Food Security**

**Introduction:**

*Eating Better: for a fair, green, healthy future* is a UK alliance that is raising awareness of the need for food policies that put sustainable food consumption at the heart of solutions to national and global food security challenges. We are calling for action by governments, the food industry and all those who can make a difference to help people move towards eating less meat and more food that’s better for us and the planet, as part of the vital task of creating sustainable food and farming systems.

Launched in July 2013 with the endorsement of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Eating Better’s growing support includes 36 national organisations and partner networks spanning the breadth of health, environment, social justice, animal welfare, international development, resource use, sustainable business and faith perspectives. (see Appendix 1)

Eating Better encourages a culture where we place greater value on the food we eat, the animals that provide it and the people who produce it.  Eating Better supports farmers who produce meat in a sustainable way.

Eating Better has called for a global conversation about meat consumption, which has as its goal a world in which everyone values and has access to healthy, humane and sustainable diets.  High meat consuming countries and individuals have reduced their consumption in line with health recommendations and greenhouse gas reduction targets.  Meat is produced humanely and sustainably, its production provides sustainable livelihoods, environmental benefits and it is consumed in quantities consistent with good health and global resource use capacity.

We welcome the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Committee’s Inquiry into food security. Our submission has been prepared in consultation with our supporting organisations and partner networks.

Our response addresses Q1: How best to improve UK (and EU) food security, including using resources more efficiently and Q7: Ways of increasing self sufficiency in products for which the UK has a comparative advantage.

**Summary:**

* **Food security policy needs to focus on consumption as well as production.** A weakness of UK government’s response to the food security challenge is that it focuses disproportionately on production-focused solutions under the framing of ‘sustainable intensification’. Policy has not yet adequately acknowledged the essential role for integrating demand-side approaches including shifting consumption patterns towards more (resource efficient) plant-based eating and less (resource inefficient) meat-based eating.
* **The evidence for addressing consumption is compelling.** It is a matter of concern to Eating Better that UK and EU policy responses to food security have not yet addressed the impacts of our unsustainable consumption given the compelling evidence that we cannot address global food security without including consumption-based approaches in the suite of policy tools.
* **Policy progress towards sustainable diets requires government leadership and Ministerial commitment.** Government has an essential role to play on sustainable food issues, providing leadership, reinforcing a sense of urgency, indicating priority areas for action and enabling others to deliver much needed action. This leadership must be integrated, i.e. key government departments for food such as Defra and Department of Health need to work together more effectively and it is vital to address both food production and consumption, in an integrated manner, rather than looking at elements in isolation. This includes the need for Defra Ministerial support to agree and integrate guidance on healthy, sustainable diets into national, local and international policy.
* **A ‘less and better’ approach to meat eating offers the potential for greater self-sufficiency in UK meat consumption.** Livestock production is integral to UK climate and geography and can provide benefits for maintaining valued landscape and semi-natural. Yet the UK is nowhere near self-sufficient in meat consumption importing 42% of domestic meat demand rising to 58% for pig meat. A policy in which the UK attempts to compete primarily on cost and moves towards greater intensification of livestock production run counter to public acceptability and growing market preferences particularly since the horsemeat scandal. Higher value production systems can deliver increased profitability for producers. A recent YouGov survey for Eating Better shows the public are interested in a ‘less and better’ approach to meat eating with consumers able to trade up to ‘better’ without increased cost. Yet 67% of people say it is hard to tell which meat is more environmentally friendly.

**Food security policy needs to focus on consumption as well as production**

1. A weakness of UK government’s response to the food security challenge is that it focuses disproportionately on production-focused solutions under the framing of ‘sustainable intensification’. The UK Government’s Foresight report on The Future of Food and Farming (2011)[[1]](#footnote-1) and the UK Strategy for Agricultural Technologies (2013)[[2]](#footnote-2) take production-based approaches.
2. Policy has not yet adequately acknowledged the essential role for integrating demand-side approaches that address the two major resource use inefficiencies within the food system: firstly the amount of food that is wasted including via over-consumption and secondly, reducing the impact of our diets by shifting consumption patterns towards more (resource efficient) plant-based eating and less (resource inefficient) meat-based eating.
3. Food waste is now gaining greater policy focus which Eating Better welcomes though there is much more that needs to be achieved throughout the food system. The significant gap within policy is a response to the need to shift diets towards healthy, sustainable eating patterns.
4. The Foresight report[[3]](#footnote-3) acknowledged the need for policies to include dietary change:

“*The solution is not just to produce more food, or change diets, or eliminate waste. The potential threats are so great that they cannot be met by making changes piecemeal to parts of the food system. It is essential that policy-makers address all areas at the same time.”* (p12)

1. and specifically policies to address demand of meat consumption:

*“Demand for the most resource-intensive types of food must be contained..”* (page 12)

*“It has been argued that a reduction in the amount of meat consumed in high- and middle-income countries would have multiple benefits: a reduced demand for grain, leading to lower greenhouse gas emissions, and a positive effect on health….. Policy-makers should recognise that more proactive measures affecting the demand and production of meat may be required should current trends in global consumption continue to rise.”* (page 22)

1. Yet this has not yet translated into policies and practices. Professor Tim Benton, the UK champion for global food security, has raised concerns,[[4]](#footnote-4) warning Government Ministers that it is no longer good enough to think exclusively of ways the country could produce more food, Government has to work on ‘demand’ through changing the way we eat and wasting less food.

**The evidence for addressing consumption is compelling**

1. It is a matter of concern to Eating Better that UK and EU policy responses to food security have not yet addressed the impacts of our unsustainable consumption given the compelling evidence that we cannot address global food security without including consumption-based approaches in the suite of policy tools.
2. The dominant narrative that has shaped policy to date is underpinned by the assertion that food production must increase by 60-70% to feed the anticipated world population of 9 billion by 2050. This is now under challenge. UN figures demonstrate that the solutions to feeding nine billion does not primarily center around increasing food production but on restructuring the way in which we use the food that we produce[[5]](#footnote-5) by:

* Making better use of crops: feeding less to animals and more to people. Globally 36% of agricultural calories are fed to animals and halving world consumption of grain-fed meat could feed around two billion more people.[[6]](#footnote-6)
* Halving food losses and waste would allow an extra one billion people to be fed
* Reducing the food intake of those who over-consume.

1. Dr Jonathan Foley, Director of the Institute on the Environment at the University of Minnesota points out the flaws of the dominant ‘grow more’ narrative[[7]](#footnote-7) explaining that changing diets from increasing wealth and richer diets, not population growth, is the dominant driver of food demand. He concludes that we could ease the pressure on the global food system by transforming diets in rich countries (US & EU) by shifting to less meat-intensive diets while also focusing on the changing diets of newly affluent global consumers.
2. Livestock production has a huge environmental footprint for GHG emissions, water and land use, pollution and biodiversity loss and grain-fed livestock production is highly inefficient. UNEP calculates that each kilo of cereals used for animal feed will produce 500kcals for human consumption whereas if used for direct human consumption will give 3000kcal. [[8]](#footnote-8)
3. The recent FAO report, Tackling Climate Change through Livestock[[9]](#footnote-9), focuses on how livestock production can be encouraged to be up to 30% more ‘efficient’. FAO acknowledges that reducing the sector’s emissions can also be achieved by reducing consumption of livestock products. Yet FAO did not investigate this approach despite quoting evidence of substantial mitigation effects, its relatively low cost compared with alternative mitigation strategies and the positive benefits to human health among populations consuming high levels of animal products.[[10]](#footnote-10)
4. Eating Better has commented[[11]](#footnote-11) that a focus on production efficiency is valuable but even a 30% increase in efficiency (and FAO questions whether this is achievable) falls far short of the reductions in GHG from livestock sector that will be required given the predicted increases in demand (approx. 70% by 2050).  In fact, this would result in at least a 12% higher footprint than now. This further demonstrates the insufficiency of a production-based efficiency approach to address the challenges of feeding a global population fairly, healthily and sustainably.
5. Further evidence for reducing consumption of high levels of animal products also comes from the new high level international report[[12]](#footnote-12): *Creating a Sustainable Food Future* produced by the World Resources Institute (WRI), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank. Among its menu of solutions to sustainably feed more than 9bn people by 2050 is the need to reduce excessive consumption of animal products:

*‘Most of the world’s people consume more milk and meat than necessary, and many consume more than is healthy. Obtaining calories and protein through animal products is also highly inefficient from a resource use standpoint. … We project an 82 percent increase in meat consumption between 2006 and 2050, and holding down growth in consumption by the world’s upper and growing middle class would reduce land demands and greenhouse gas emissions…..Yet this menu item may be necessary not to close the food gap but just to keep it from growing larger. … High-consuming regions will probably need to eat less meat just to provide room within the FAO projections for billions of people in low-consuming regions to eat a little more.’*

**Policy progress towards sustainable diets lacks Ministerial commitment**

1. In 2009 the UK Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) advised government (in work commissioned by Defra) that the priority elements of sustainable diets[[13]](#footnote-13) are to:
   * Reduce consumption of meat and dairy products
   * Reduce consumption of food and drink of low nutritional value (i.e. fatty and sugary foods)
   * Reduce food waste.
2. Eating Better supports the SDC’s recommendation that Defra (with DH) provides advice to the public and the food chain on sustainable diets that integrates health and environmental considerations.
3. Over the last five years work towards such guidelines has stalled repeatedly. In 2010 the then FSA-led Integrated Advice to Consumers project was not continued by the incoming Coalition Government. And Government’s Direct Gov online advice on the Environment and Greener Living, which included advice on making greener food and drink choices was removed in 2012[[14]](#footnote-14).
4. DEFRA’s Green Food Project[[15]](#footnote-15) (published in July 2012) recognised the need for more emphasis on the role that diet and consumption play in the sustainability of the food system.
5. Pressure from NGOs including Eating Better supporting organisations led Defra to facilitate further work in 2013. This resulted in a process engaging collaborative working groups, in which Eating Better and a number of our supporting organisations participated, alongside food and farming industry representatives and academics. A report was published July 2013.[[16]](#footnote-16)
6. This included draft guidelines for healthy sustainable diets that now await Defra ministerial support for peer review and agreement. Government adoption of such guidelines and advice for consumers and the food chain are a necessary step in developing policies and practices that support dietary transition.  Official bodies in other European countries, including France, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands have already produced such guidelines.
7. A response from Defra has been delayed by the Ministerial reshuffle with George Eustice replacing David Heath as the Minister responsible. This promising work, including the draft guidelines for healthy, sustainable diets, has now lost momentum with a lack of clarity over Defra’s commitment to support and take forward this work.
8. A key conclusion from the working groups is that Government has an essential role to play on sustainable food issues, providing leadership, reinforcing a sense of urgency, indicating priority areas for action and enabling others to deliver much needed action. This leadership must be integrated, i.e. key government departments for food such as Defra and Department of Health need to work together more effectively. Secondly the report concludes, it is vital to address both food production and consumption, in an integrated manner, rather than looking at elements in isolation. These are conclusions that Eating Better strongly supports.

**Ways of increasing self-sufficiency in products for which the UK has a comparative advantage (Q7)**

1. Eating Better advocates a ‘less and better’ approach to meat eating. The 2013 WWF/Food Ethics Council report, Prime Cuts: Valuing the Meat We Eat[[17]](#footnote-17) illustrates ways of defining and valuing ‘better’ meat consumption.
2. Livestock production is integral to UK climate and geography and can provide benefits for maintaining valued landscape and semi-natural habitats such as plant and wildlife-rich meadows and pastures with permanent pasture for grazing providing a carbon sink.
3. Yet the UK imports 42% of domestic meat demand rising to 58% for pig meat. [[18]](#footnote-18) The UK is therefore nowhere near self-sufficient in meat consumption. A policy toward ‘less’ meat consumption would be compatible with increased self-sufficiency and more profitable farming if a larger share of the meat consumed in the UK were produced here and farmers received a higher return for their meat.
4. A policy in which the UK attempts to compete primarily on cost is incompatible with the benefits that many consumers seek, particularly since the horsemeat scandal. Moves to greater intensification of livestock production run counter to public acceptability and growing market preferences. Higher value production systems can deliver increased profitability for producers. A ‘less and better’ approach to meat eating means consumers will be able to trade up to ‘better’ without increased cost.
5. The comparative advantage UK production can provide is to build the market for ‘better’ meat that is produced to higher animal welfare standards, better for biodiversity and the environment (eg organic, naturally grazed, pasture-fed, extensively produced, produced from High Nature Value Farming) and better for reconnecting producers and consumers through providing meat with a known provenance and traceability. More food waste could also be used for animal feed for pigs and poultry as advocated by The Pig Idea[[19]](#footnote-19) to reduce reliance on increasingly expensive and environmentally damaging feed such as soya.
6. The benefits of pasture-fed over grain fed production is increasingly being recognised. MPs on the UK Parliament’s International Development Committee[[20]](#footnote-20) called for greater efforts to improve global food security.  Measures include encouraging UK consumers to reduce their meat consumption and a stronger focus on pasture-fed livestock production.
7. EFRA’s 2009 Inquiry on Food Security*[[21]](#footnote-21)* acknowledged the importance of considering meat consumption for health and environment, recommending that Defra do more to raise awareness of their choices:

*‘UK consumers buying meat and dairy products should be encouraged to consider the environmental, as well as the health, impacts of their choices. To enable consumers to make informed decisions, Defra needs to do more work on what are the most sustainable methods of livestock production, and the balance to be struck between animal welfare, biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, and the need to conserve inputs such as water.*

1. A recent YouGov survey[[22]](#footnote-22) for Eating Better has shown that the public are interested in a ‘less and better’ approach to meat eating with around one in three (34%) say they are willing to consider eating less meat. Despite rising food prices, around half those surveyed said they would be willing to pay more for ‘better’ meat if it tastes better, is healthier, produced to higher animal welfare standards or provides better financial returns to farmers.
2. The survey also found support for more information and better labelling. Two out of three people (67%) agreed it is hard to tell which meat is more environmentally friendly.
3. Eating Better recommends the need for research to identify the incentives for producers, food chain and consumers that would support market transition towards greater self sufficiency in UK meat production with a ‘less and better’ approach to meat consumption.

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**Appendix 1:**

**Eating Better Supporting Organisations**

Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC)

Behaviour Change

British Dietetic Association

Compassion in World Farming

Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH)

Fairfood International

Farms Not Factories

Feeding the 5000

First Steps Nutrition Trust

Food Ethics Council

Food for Life Partnership

Forum for the Future

Friends of the Earth

Greenpeace

LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming)

Oxfam

Part-time Carnivore

People & Planet

Progressio

RSPB

Send a Cow

Slow Food UK

Soil Association

Sustainable Food Trust

Sustainable Restaurant Association

The Pig Idea

UK Health Forum

Vegetarian for Life

Vegetarian Society

Waste Watch (part of Keep Britain Tidy)

World Society for the Protection of Animals

WWF-UK

**Partner Networks**

Food Climate Research Network

Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming

Sustainable Food Cities Network

UK Food Group

1. Foresight.The Future of Food and Farming (2011) Final Project Report. The Government Office for Science, London. <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/foresight/docs/food-and-farming/11-546-future-of-food-and-farming-report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. HM Government (2013) A UK Strategy for Agricultural Technologies <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/227259/9643-BIS-UK_Agri_Tech_Strategy_Accessible.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Foresight.The Future of Food and Farming (2011) Final Project Report. The Government Office for Science, London. <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/foresight/docs/food-and-farming/11-546-future-of-food-and-farming-report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/10193689/Food-crisis-Professor-tells-families-to-cut-amount-they-eat-by-a-third.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.eating-better.org/blog/3/Feeding-nine-billion-how-much-extra-food-do-we-need-to-produce.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Emily S Cassidy *et al* 2013 *Environ. Res. Lett.* **8** 034015 [doi:10.1088/1748-9326/8/3/034015](http://dx.doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/8/3/034015) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://ensia.com/voices/changing-the-global-food-narrative/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.unep.org/pdf/foodcrisis_lores.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/resources/en/publications/tackling_climate_change/index.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. see page 45 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3437e/i3437e.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <http://www.eating-better.org/blog/19/Eating-Better-responds-to-new-FAO-Livestock-report.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Creating%20a%20Sustainable%20Food%20Future.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. [Sustainable Development Commission (2009) Setting the Table: priority elements of sustainable diets.](http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=1033) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This is archived here: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121015000000/www.direct.gov.uk/en/Environmentandgreenerliving/Greenerhomeandgarden/Greenershopping/DG_064434> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-food-project-conclusions> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Sustainable Consumption Report, Follow-Up to the Green Food Project, Jully 2013, Defra. <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/229537/pb14010-green-food-project-sustainable-consumption.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <http://www.wwf.org.uk/wwf_articles.cfm?unewsid=6466> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. EBLEX (2011) UK Year Book 2011 Meat and Livestock. Kenilworth: Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <http://thepigidea.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmintdev/176/176.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. EFRA Committee, Securing food supplies up to 2050: the challenges faced by the UK, July 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. <http://www.eating-better.org/blog/23/New-survey-shows-support-for-Eating-Better-messages.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)